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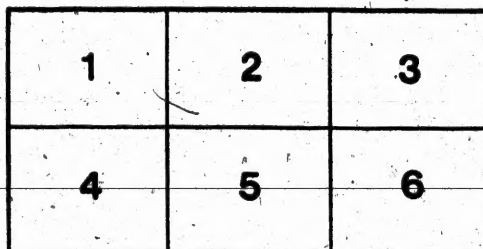
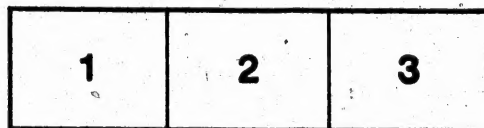
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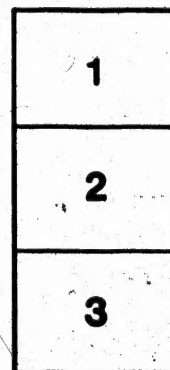
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CONFIRMATION:

A SCRIPTURAL AND RATIONAL ORDINANCE.

A SERMON

PREACHED IN THE CATHEDRAL OF ST. GEORGE,

KINGSTON, C. W.,

BY

JOHN TRAVERS LEWIS, D.D., LL.D.,

LORD BISHOP OF ONTARIO.

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CONFIRMATION.

"Then laid they their hands on them, and they received the Holy Ghost."
Acts, viii., 7.

We are assembled, my brethren, for the ministration of the Apostolic Ordinance of Confirmation to such candidates as having been taught and examined by the Pastor of this Parish shall be solemnly presented to receive "the laying on of hands." Such an event as the present is always one of interest which is evinced by the large number of people who attend the Service, and as it is very probable that there are many here present who know but little of the Church's ordinance, and some perhaps who regard the rite as antiquated or superstitious or unscriptural, I shall, with God's help, not only administer the holy rite, but preach a sermon on its nature and object.

As members of the United Church of England and Ireland, it is our privilege as well as our boast that we are always ready to give a reason of the hope that is in us. We do not shrink from an appeal to the written Word of God in behalf of all our doctrines and all our discipline. There is indeed another method by which we may establish the propriety of observing any ordinance—an appeal to reason, but a good Churchman will always put the Bible first, reason second, and therefore I shall lay the foundation of this matter deep in the Word of God, before pointing out how reasonable a service it is, that so you may be better prepared with unprejudiced minds to receive my appeal to reason in favor of Confirmation.

Before, however, commencing the argument from Scripture, let me observe that it should be no stumbling-block to us that some people, and they both numerous and educated, should deny the scriptural character of the rite of Confirmation. If we are to throw aside every thing which some persons cannot find in the Bible, we may as well give up the Bible altogether. Multitudes cannot see the doctrine of the Trinity in the Bible, others deny that they can find any authority in the Bible for the practice of observing the first day of the week instead of the seventh, others cannot see in the Bible the Divinity of Christ or the duty of fasting, or the Sacrament of Infant Baptism; numbers of people who would be offended if they were not called Christians, cannot see the doctrine of the atonement or eternal punishment in the Bible; in short, there is not an Article of the Apostles' Creed which has not been called unscriptural by professing Christians. It should be sufficient for us that the Church of which we are members says that the rite of Confirmation is to be found in the Bible as an Apostolic practice, and I shall now proceed to the proof.

The text gives us an account of the first *Christian* Confirmation on record; I say *Christian* Confirmation, because the Jewish Church practised a rite very similar. We learn from Jewish authorities that every young Jew when he had reached the age of twelve years was called a "son of the commandment," and after having been duly instructed in the law of Moses was brought to Jerusalem before "some ancient man that he may bless him and confirm him and pray over him," and was then bound to attend the Passover. It is indeed highly probable that this was the occasion spoken of by St. Luke when the parents of our Lord took him at the age of twelve years up to Jerusalem "after the custom of the feast." From this Jewish original the Apostles derived the practice of Confirmation which the text describes, and let me ask your attention while I refer to the facts of the interesting occurrence.

Philip the Deacon having converted a number of persons to Christianity in the City of Samaria, intelligence of the fact reached the ears of the Apostles at Jerusalem; they immediately sent two of their number, St. Peter and St. John, to Samaria, who

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having called the new converts together, prayed for them, and laid their hands upon them, and the result was that they received the Holy Ghost.

Now for what purpose was this interesting event recorded in Scripture? Was it written simply to amuse us, or to mislead us? Is it merely a scrap of history such as we may find in the history of England or Greece? It is certainly historically true, but it is much more than that, it is a portion of inspired Scripture which is profitable for doctrine, and instruction in righteousness; the Holy Spirit would never have inspired St. Luke to pen this narrative of an occurrence in Apostolic Church history, if He did not intend that we should be taught by it. Knowing the liability we should naturally incur to imitate the doings of the Apostles, He would have placed a stumbling-block in our path if He did not intend to put on record a lesson for all time. What then is this lesson? It is, as the Church tells us, that we following the example of the holy Apostles may lay our hands on baptized members of the Church "to certify them by this sign of God's favor and gracious goodness towards them." Again in the 19th chapter of the Acts we read of another Confirmation. Here the Apostle who confirmed was St. Paul, and the place Ephesus. Finding certain disciples, St. Paul directed that they should be baptized into the name of Christ, but this was not enough, he next "laid his hands upon them and the Holy Ghost came upon them." From the casual way in which these Confirmations are mentioned, we infer that they were of constant occurrence—an established usage, and the remarks I have made regarding the event at Samaria apply equally to that at Ephesus, both are parts of an inspired narration and the only reasonable answer to the question, in what consists their inspiration, is that before given, viz., that the Holy Spirit speaks to us through the example of the Holy Apostles. It is not to be expected that we should find many instances of Confirmation recorded in the brief Church history of St. Luke. In that history, however, the Holy Spirit teaches us by Apostolic *example* in the two famous cases already mentioned, and in the Epistles we are taught the same duty by *precept* incidentally. In the first chapter of his Epistle to the Ephesians, St. Paul writing to the same Church at Ephesus where he had formerly

confirmed the disciples (as narrated in Acts xix.), says, "in whom also after that ye believed, ye were *sealed* with that Holy Spirit of promise." What does the Apostle here mean by *sealed*? He meant that they had received the Spirit through Confirmation or imposition of hands, the term *sealing*, in Apostolic times, meaning exactly the same thing as *confirming*. If we wish to *confirm* a document we *seal* it, and thus the propriety of the word is manifest. Indeed both terms occur in 2 Cor. i. 21, 22, "Now He which *confirmeth* us with you in Christ, and hath anointed us, is God who hath also *sealed* us, and given us the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts." But in Heb. vi. 1, 2, St. Paul gives us a clear and unequivocal testimony in favor of Confirmation; the Apostle is enumerating "the principles of the doctrine of Christ," the rudiments of our religion, the alphabet of Christianity, and urges the Hebrews to leave them and go on unto perfection. What are these first principles according to St. Paul? They are Repentance, Faith, the doctrine of Baptisms and of *laying on of hands*, the resurrection and future judgment. Now *that* cannot be an unimportant or merely formal ceremony which is one of "the principles of the doctrine of Christ," and so indisputably does this passage give us a scriptural sanction for Confirmation, that Calvin admitted it, and Luther acted on it, and almost all commentators of note assent to it. But if the rite then be so plainly scriptural, why do not all believers in inspiration practice it? The reason is, that Confirmation, from Apostolic days, has been administered by Bishops or the highest order in the ministry of the Church, and consequently they who throw aside Episcopacy are forced to neglect Confirmation and even to decry it as useless; that rite which through their own fault they cannot practice they are for consistency's sake obliged to condemn, and in order to prove that it is unscriptural, the less informed of them would make us believe that St. Paul did not *confirm* the disciples at Ephesus but *ordained* them, and that he is not speaking to the Hebrews of Confirmation at all, but of Ordination. But it seems evident that the rite celebrated by St. Paul at Ephesus was the very same as that practised by St. Peter and St. John at Samaria, and we may be sure that they were not sent down to ordain the "men and women" whom St. Philip had baptized; we may also

safely conclude that St. Paul would not have ordained as preachers of the word those disciples at Ephesus who were themselves so ignorant as not to have heard of the existence of the Holy Ghost. Such a mode of evading the force of the text (Heb. vi. 12.) only shows to what straits men are driven when once they strive to make the Scriptures square with their preconceived prejudices; surely Ordination is not one of the principles of Christ's doctrine in the same sense as Repentance, Faith, the Resurrection and future judgment. Observe, St. Paul is mentioning principles which are of universal application. All Christians are bound to repent, believe and be baptized, and shall rise and be judged, but all Christians are not bound to be ordained. Let us observe likewise that the Apostle gives us these principles in groups of pairs—each doublet consisting of "two principles" inseparably connected, and all in the natural, regular order of occurrence. First, Repentance and Faith which ever go together in St. Paul's teaching. Secondly, the doctrine of Baptisms and the laying on of hands, the latter of which has in the Church succeeded the former, if we interpret the laying on of hands to mean Confirmation. Thirdly, the Resurrection and Judgment. Any one can see how the chain of principles is broken and the force of St. Paul's arrangement spoiled by the wretched device of substituting Ordination for Confirmation. And here it will be necessary to refute another argument which has been devised to overthrow the scriptural sanction to Confirmation. It is said that the "laying on of hands" was designed for the imparting of the extraordinary gifts of the Holy Ghost, and that when those extraordinary gifts ceased to be manifested the "laying on of hands" ceased also. But we altogether deny that miraculous gifts in every case followed the laying on of hands. In the case of the Samaritan converts we may surmise that some or perhaps all of them like the Ephesian disciples "spoke with tongues and prophesied," and the gift of the Holy Ghost may have taken this shape on those occasions for the purpose of affording a miraculous evidence of Christianity, but St. Paul tells us that "the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal. For to one is given by the Spirit the word of *wisdom*, to another the word of *knowledge* by the same Spirit, to another *faith* by the same spirit, to another

the gifts of healing, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another discerning of spirits, to another divers kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues." When therefore the extraordinary gifts of the Spirit ceased, it by no means follows that the ordinary gifts ceased likewise, and if the gifts continued why should not the means thereto have been continued? The whole tone of the history of the two Confirmations recorded in the Acts leads to the belief that in those days the laying on of hands followed Baptism as a matter of course, and there is no more intimation of the cessation or extinction of the one than of the other. Indeed the juxtaposition of "the laying on of hands" with the "doctrine of Baptisms" in the enumeration of "principles of the doctrine of Christ" seems decisive of the perpetual obligation to observe the ordinance. St. Paul then asked the Ephesians a very natural question "have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed?" or as it might be rendered "did ye receive the Holy Ghost when ye became believers?" He did not ask "did ye receive Baptism," he took that for granted, but he knew that in all probability they never before had an opportunity of receiving the laying on of an Apostle's hands; hence his question which he probably put to all similarly situated whenever he met with them. From these considerations it is clear that the assumption that confirmation ceased when the miraculous speaking in tongues ceased, is altogether untenable, because the "laying on of hands" was not administered solely with a view to speaking in tongues, which did not always follow the rite; and we infer from the words of St. Paul "I would that ye all spake with tongues but rather that ye prophesied," 1 Cor. xiv. 5, that not even the Apostles could at their discretion confer this power. But enough has been said to show that there is undoubted scriptural authority for the ordinance which has descended to us from the Apostles themselves and has ever been practised wherever the Church of God has been planted in its purity and integrity; and the Confirmation to be held in this house of prayer to-day is one of those notes or marks by which we recognize the Church as Scriptural and Apostolic, and it identifies and links us with the Church at Ephesus and Samaria in outward form and inward spirit.

Having thus briefly given a summary of the argument in favor of Confirmation from *Scripture*, I proceed to establish the propriety of this ordinance on *rational* grounds; because if *Scripture* were wholly silent on the subject, yet if we believed Confirmation to be a useful ceremony, one calculated to benefit the recipients and to edify the witnesses, we should be perfectly warranted in the practice of it, for "the Church hath power to decree rites or ceremonies" provided they be not "contrary to God's word written;" now no one will contend that Confirmation is *contrary* to God's word, the most that is urged against it amounts to this, that some persons cannot find it enjoined there.

I. I need scarcely remind you that the Church has ever admitted infants into Church membership. By the sacrament of circumcision children entered into covenant relationship with God under the Jewish dispensation. Jesus Christ never repealed the law by which infants were made Churchmembers, but on the contrary, both by what He did, and by what He said He declared its perpetuity for "He took them up in His arms, laid His hands upon them, and blessed them," and added the significant words "of such is the kingdom of Heaven," thus anticipating and providing an answer to a question which was sure to arise, whether or not infants were to have less privileges under the Christian than they possessed under the Jewish covenant. You were accordingly admitted into the fellowship of Christ's religion in your infancy, and on the solemn occasion of your regeneration, your sponsors were thus addressed "ye are to take care that this child be brought to the Bishop to be confirmed by him so soon as he can say the Creed, the Lord's Prayer and the Ten Commandments, in the vulgar tongue, and be further instructed in the Church Catechism set forth for that purpose." In obedience to that requirement some of you are present to-day to acknowledge "that you are bound to believe and to do all these things that your godfathers and godmothers then undertook for you." Confirmation is therefore the *completion of infant Baptism in an Ecclesiastical point of view*. It is but reasonable that the promise and vow made for you when infants, should be assumed openly before the Church when you have reached years of discretion. Without Confirmation there would be something evidently wanting after Baptism. It is by the practice of this

"He that believeth & is baptized
shall be saved!"

rite that we are enabled to reply to the Anabaptist who derides the idea of baptizing unconscious infants and thus turns into ridicule the great God himself who commanded that children should be admitted into his ancient Church. We say, yes, we do believe that our little ones are in Baptism - "made members of Christ, children of God and inheritors of the kingdom of Heaven," but we do not rest there. We insist that all who have received the blessings of Baptism in infancy should openly and publicly before the Church acknowledge their obligations when they have arrived at years of discretion, and are able to discern right from wrong and good from evil.

II. Confirmation, moreover, is a *public profession of religion*. It is a confession of the Faith, and homage openly done to Christ. This view of the rite is most important. When the Apostles preached, the great mass of their converts were of course adults who by receiving Baptism made a confession of their faith, and if it was necessary that *they* should receive the imposition of hands, how much more necessary is it for us to do so who were baptised in infancy when unconscious of the confession made in our name. It is indeed often urged as an excuse for evading this ordinance, that provided the heart is right, it matters little whether we openly before the Church and the world profess our allegiance to Christ. But it is not enough that the heart be right. St. Paul says "if thou shalt confess with thy *mouth* the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine *heart* that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the *heart* man believeth unto righteousness and with the *mouth* confession is made unto salvation." If we be content with the supposed rectitude of our hearts and refrain from a public acknowledgment of our obligation, then so far as God's honor is concerned and our neighbor's edification is involved we might as well be infidels. St. Peter did not argue nor did Cornelius plead that because the Holy Ghost had miraculously fallen upon the latter, he need not be baptised, but on the contrary, St. Peter made the fact of Cornelius having received the Holy Ghost an argument in favor of his being baptised. Our blessed Lord did not urge His sinlessness as a plea for His exemption from submitting to the baptism of St. John, but received that Baptism on the express ground that it was necessary to fulfil

all righteousness, or in other words, perform a righteous duty. The fact is, that no one's heart is right "who willingly and purposely doth openly break the tradition and ceremonies of the Church." Some persons again neglect the Church's ceremony of Confirmation on the delusive ground that they escape responsibility; but the obligations of Confirmation lie on all whether they be confirmed or not. It is not Confirmation that imposes any new obligations; they spring from the fact that we have been baptised and taught the way of salvation. The difference between those who obey and those who disobey this requirement of the Church is that the one is happy in having the opportunity of confessing their Saviour, the other is secretly miserable in being ashamed of Him. There are multitudes of young men and women who would sooner do anything than make a public profession of their faith and obligations. Thousands are laughed out of their religion tho' they would be greatly superior in argument to those who laughed at them if they had only the moral courage to argue the matter. Our Saviour foresaw this, and hence perhaps the solemn warning against being "ashamed" of Him, and the cheering promise "whosoever shall confess me before men, him will I confess before my Father which is in Heaven."

The reasonableness of publicly acknowledging our Churchmembership and consequent obligations is so evident that almost all religious bodies have some ceremony in which this acknowledgment is made. One sect gives you the right hand of fellowship, publicly. Another insists on your public immersion, while another insists on your joining a class. Now the Church's mode is that which you will presently witness—Prayer and "the laying on of hands," that significant and touching rite which has descended to us, who are justified in adopting what was practised by Patriarchs and Prophets and Apostles and even by our adorable Redeemer Himself.

III. Confirmation is also a *perpetual protest on the part of the Church against a non-religious education*. There is the more necessity for viewing Confirmation in this light because the theory most popular is that children ought not to be biassed or prejudiced in favor of distinctive doctrine, but that they should be allowed to grow up to years of discretion untrammelled, and then they

will select a religion for themselves, and this is considered to be a liberal and just way of dealing with the immortal souls of the young. Now the Church, *believing* the teaching of the Bible, protests against such fatal error, and in the ordinances of Confirmation provides that the period between Baptism and the laying on of hands shall be employed in teaching the young the solemn vow, promise and profession made in their name, so that when they present themselves to the Bishop they may do so as intelligent and well instructed candidates, knowing what they do and why they do it. And if religious teaching be necessary in England and Ireland where the young are from their earliest years taught the rudiments of Christianity and the facts of the Bible, how much more necessary is it in a country like this where so many are growing up to manhood and womanhood as ignorant of the Scriptures of God as tho' they lived in Heathendom? We know that in Canada where the Clergy are so few, the missions so large, and the people so scattered, it is impossible for the clergy to impart this religious knowledge as they ought. But if we cannot do it as well as we ought, yet we should do it as well as we can, and in Confirmation there is an admirable opportunity for the Parish Priest to gather his young parishioners together and teach them the rudiments of Christianity and the distinctive doctrines of the Church. He can avail himself of that period of life when the heart is most open to religious impressions, when it has not as yet been hardened by too close a contact with the world, to show how God's word abounds with precepts and examples encouraging to youthful piety. He can point out how they teach us that tho' God is pleased with the piety of old age, yet that His delight is in that of the young. He can prove from reason why this must be so. When an aged person turns to God and brings forth fruits meet for repentance, blessed be God, he saves his own soul: but during a long life he may have dishonored his Maker, he may have by example done more injury to the Church of God than all the tears he can shed or the prayers he can utter can ever atone for. But when the young grow in the grace of Baptism and thus from earliest years live under religion's happy influence, not only do they save their own souls but they recommend that religion to others. The religion of the old is like a rivulet

rising near the sea, very beautiful while it lasts but it is soon lost in the ocean of eternity; but the religion of the young is like a fountain rising in the midst of a great continent, the little spring gathers strength as it flows along irrigating valleys and refreshing cities, till as a mighty river it rolls into the ocean. Hence we see why Solomon urges the necessity of "training up a child in the way he should go," why St. Paul directs us to "bring up our children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord;" hence has God provided that we should read of such beautiful examples of youthful piety as Samuel, Obadiah, David, St. John the Baptist and Timothy, "who from a child knew the Holy Scriptures," and be it observed that the names of his mother and grandmother have been immortalized by the Holy Ghost for the encouragement of Christian Parents, so that their names are known where those of Kings and Potentates are never heard, and for this reason doubtless that they taught St. Timothy the Holy Scriptures in his youth; even among the few items of information vouchsafed to us concerning the boyhood of our Redeemer we read that "He increased in wisdom and stature and in favor with God and man."

But if we had no Scriptural teaching on the subject of early religious training, the lamentable results flowing from its neglect should impress us solemnly. If Parents and Sponsors defer this training till the young of the flock are old enough to choose a creed for themselves—if they, under the pretence of a false liberality, do not select a belief for their children, the Devil will; if youth be not biased aright by the Church, they will be assuredly biased wrongly by the world, the flesh and the Devil. Indeed I cannot imagine a sincere Churchman who will not bias and prejudice his children in favor of those doctrines which he believes himself. If he holds the doctrines of the Church to be truly Scriptural, if he professes to look to them for a support in life and a comfort in the hour of death, if he believes that the faith which has come down to us sealed by the blood of martyrs is worth perpetuating, and yet takes no pains to bring up his children in the same belief, he must be an utter hypocrite. And what are the fruits of this so called liberal but unscriptural idea of withholding distinctive religious education from the young? The result is shown in the thousands of so called Christians in our midst

who deem it something creditable to their character, as evincing liberality and elevation above the petty differences of sects, to reply, when asked to what religious body they belong, that they are *friendly to all Denominations but members of none!*

IV. Confirmation is not only a reasonable sequel to Holy Baptism, but it is a wise qualification for admission to the highest of all means of grace, the Holy Communion. The Church does not institute an inquisitorial examination into the religious condition of candidates for Communion, she does not insist on professions of conversion, nor on declarations of religious experience, nor on the attainment of an exalted standard of holiness, as indispensable conditions for admission to the Eucharist. To do so would be to supply motives and opportunities for hypocrisy, and spiritual pride, and to proclaim that means of grace were appointed by God for those who needed them least. Her wise arrangement permits all who have been confirmed, or who are ready or desirous of being confirmed, to present themselves at the Sacred Feast. She is thus secure that none shall communicate who have not been instructed in their duty, and taught that the Holy Communion is so "divine and comfortable a thing to them who receive it worthily, and so dangerous to them that will presume to receive it unworthily;" and having taken this wise precaution, she throws the responsibility of either receiving or rejecting it on her confirmed members. On all occasions therefore of Confirmation I direct that the Lord's Supper shall be administered, not with the expectation that all the confirmed *will* become communicants, but with the prayerful hope that very many will avail themselves of the blessed privilege: I shall however postpone my remarks to the candidates on this subject till after the laying on of hands, and I shall then endeavor to show them such reasons and to supply them with such motives as may induce them to reflect that if they be fit to be confirmed, they are fit to receive the Holy Communion.

In conclusion, brethren, let the adult members of this congregation be now reminded of their Confirmation in years gone by, and whilst they implore pardon for a life spent perhaps in a manner not conformable to their obligations let them in silent prayer ask of God to bless His ordinance to the souls of these young

candidates; and to you my younger Brethren I would say, act and feel like beings to whom grace is about to be given, as it assuredly will if you receive "the laying on of hands" in Penitence, Faith and Charity. Confirmation was instituted by Him who devised no useless ceremonies and we shall now proceed to the administration of it, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

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